



Division of Accountability & Research

Student School Climate Survey – High School Executive Summary 2008-09

Perceptions of school climate and safety can have a distinct impact on how well students learn. Research indicates that improved school climate can contribute to higher student achievement, higher moral among students and teachers, fewer student dropouts and reduced violence. While school reforms typically focus on student achievement due to external accountability systems, these reforms can be limited when school climate is a negative factor. In order to evaluate Aurora Public Schools students' perceptions of schools safety and climate, a survey was administered to middle and high school students in January of 2009. Note that students' perceptions are just that, perceptions, and do not reflect with certainty what is happening in APS schools.

Methodology

A 60 item school climate survey was given to APS middle and high school students in January 2009. Enrollment at the high school level at the time of the survey was 8,318. A total of 5,324 students completed the survey for a completion rate of 64%. The student climate survey was first administered in 2006-07 with a completion rate of 71% (2008: 70%).

Additional Items

The 2008-09 student survey includes items regarding drug use for the first time. The school and district level results for these five items are forthcoming. The information was included to provide data for the grants office for future funding opportunities that require baseline drug use reporting. Also, for the second year a number of questions specific to food services were included and two new items regarding cyberbullying were also included as part of the survey.

Summary of Results

Results of the survey are grouped into six areas:

- General Climate
- Trust and Respect
- Academics
- Safety and Bullying
- Harassment
- Self Concept

Students' responses were analyzed at the district level, school level and disaggregated by ethnicity. In most cases, responses did not differ significantly by ethnicity.

General Climate. For general school climate, students responded most positively to the statements “I feel welcomed at school” (55% agreed). When asked about feeling positive about their school, less students agreed (39%) and 23% disagreed with the statement. Reasons for students feelings about their school may be tied to their responses about: Feeling encouraged to participate in school activities (26% disagreed); Believing school rules are consistently enforced by teachers (22% disagreed) and monitors (20%); Perceptions that they get help on non-academic issues (31% disagreed); and believing their belongings are safe at school (60% disagreed).

Trust and Respect. While 54% of students agreed they had an adult at school they trust, another 26% of students disagreed with this statement. Similar findings were noted for responses to the statement “I have at least one adult in this school I can go to when I need help (57% agreed, 22% disagreed, 21% neutral).

Students in general appear positive in regard to having the respect of the teaching staff. When asked if they feel respected by teachers, 52% agreed, 30% were neutral and 18% disagreed.

Students generally feel its ok to ask questions at school (65% agreed). Rules about name calling and put downs were reported to be mixed as 48% agreed that these rules existed and 23% disagreed.

Academics. The highest level of agreement to statements on academics included 70% of students responding that their teachers expect them to graduate from high school and at school they get the academic help they need for classes (53% agreed).

Students were slightly less positive when responding to the statements “I receive helpful information about my academic progress from my teachers (47% agreed), “I get academic/career planning help from my school counselor when I need it” (46% agreed), “Classes at this school provide a solid foundation for my future” (41% agreed), and “This school sets high and realistic learning expectations for me” (42% agreed).

Safety. The majority of students disagreed with the statement “I feel afraid at school” (70% disagreed, 12% agreed). When the question was turned around and stated positively “At school, I feel safe”, less students responded positively (41% agreed and 23% disagreed).

A significant percent of students responded that they have experienced physical aggression at school (36% agreed). While students perceived that adults will help if they see someone being bullied or harassed (54% agree), there was a small percent of students that disagreed with this statement (18%).

Threats to students is perceived to be a significant issue for students as 49% agreed that they have heard students threaten to hurt someone or take their things and 53% disagreed with the statement that “Other students will approach adults for help if they see someone being bullied or harassed.” In regards to being cyberbullied a relatively small percentage of students (11%) report having had this experience with 29% reporting that they would discuss this with an adult if it happened.

Harassed. A large percent of students responded that they have seen students of different cultural, racial or ethnic backgrounds harassed (37% agreed). Harassment or discrimination for religious reasons was perceived as being much less frequent (73% disagreed, 13% neutral) as was sexual harassment (66% disagreed, 15% neutral) and harassment due to sexual orientation (73% disagreed, 15% neutral). Two student groups, those that speak a language other than English and students with disabilities were often perceived as being treated less than fairly (22% agreed for ELL and 21% agreed for students with disabilities).

Self Concept. Self Concept for the purposes of this survey is students' perceptions of how they 'fit in' at school and how well they believe they are doing academically. Most students reported that it is easy to get to know people at school (52% agreed) and few report they feel rejected by their classmates for being a good student (13% agreed).

Historical Change. For all items in which historical data was available, the between year change in percent of agreement was flat with no items experiencing change in agreement rates (Agree/Strongly Agree) that exceeded 3%.

Conclusions

Results from this survey indicate that school climate is multifaceted and that students do not perceive all aspects of school climate the same. Students report they are not afraid at school, they feel they fit in, and they feel supported by their friends. Students also believe that teachers expect them to graduate from high school and that they get the academic help they need.

While many positive aspects of school climate were reported, there are areas of school climate that need to be monitored and followed-up on. These include but are not limited to: students having an adult at school that they can trust and go to when they need help; more consistent enforcement of school rules; getting help with non-academic issues; feeling that their belongings are safe; reduction of harassment and threats to fellow students; and more confidence that their school is providing a solid foundation for their future.